



**TO:** The Montana Abolition Coalition  
**FROM:** Michael Bloomfield And Dave Tollaksen  
**RE:** Attitudes Towards The Death Penalty In Montana  
**DATE:** February 13, 2009

*The Mellman Group conducted a statewide survey of 400 likely 2010 voters in Montana. The poll was conducted by telephone February 9-12, 2009 using random digit dialing. The margin of error for this survey is +/-4.9% statewide at the 95% level of confidence. The margin of error is larger for subgroups.*

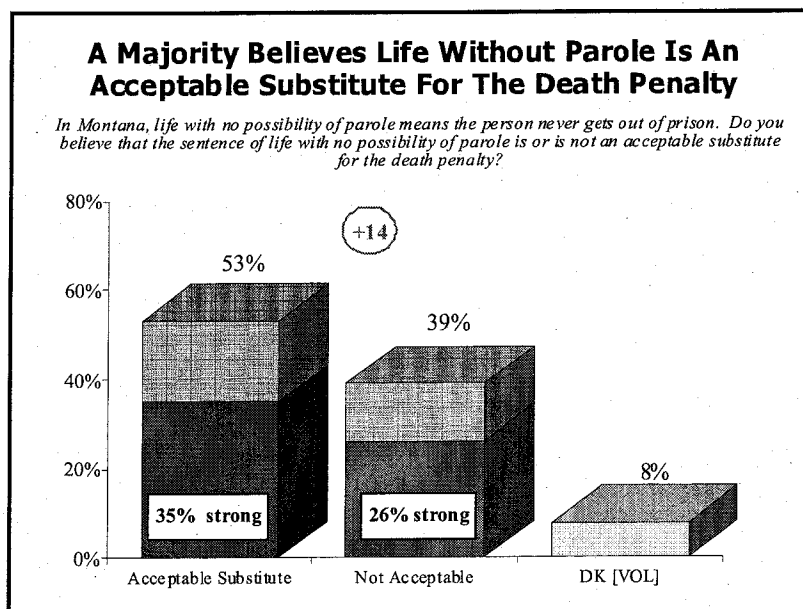
Our recently completed survey shows a majority of Montanans believe there are acceptable substitutes for the death penalty. Over half (53%) believe that a life sentence without the possibility of parole is an acceptable substitute, and a plurality supports a sentence other than death over capital punishment for convicted murderers. Additionally, few voters feel strongly about keeping the death penalty, and even fewer feel strongly enough to oppose a state legislator on that issue alone.

### Life Without Parole Is An Acceptable Substitute To The Death Penalty

When asked if the sentence of life with no possibility of parole is an acceptable substitute for the death penalty, a majority (53%) agreed that it is an acceptable substitute, with only 39% disagreeing. Just over a quarter of Montanans (26%) feel strongly that it is not an acceptable substitute, compared to more than a third (35%) who feel strongly the other way.

This preference for a life sentence without parole over the death penalty extends across the state through every major media market. Majorities in the Missoula (61% acceptable), Billings (51%) and Great Falls (50%) media markets, and a plurality in the Butte-Bozeman market (46% acceptable, 42% not acceptable) believe that life without parole is acceptable. Even Republicans (46% acceptable, 48% not acceptable) and conservatives (43% acceptable, 49% not acceptable) are essentially divided on the idea.

More Montanans preferred other sentencing options to the death penalty even for people convicted of murder. Nearly half (47%) preferred either life in prison without parole (31%) or some



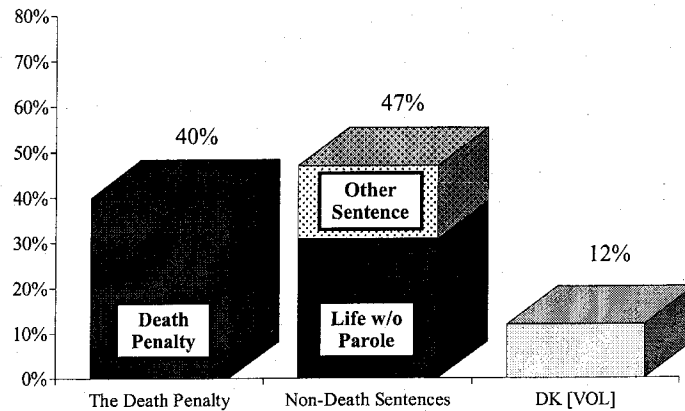
other sentence for those convicted of murder (16%), compared to four in ten (40%) preferring the death penalty. More than one in ten (12%) did not feel strongly enough to have an opinion.

In every major media market, there was only limited support for the death penalty ranging from 33% in the Missoula media market to 43% in Billings. Majorities of Democrats (59% non-death penalty), liberals (56%) and moderates (50%) support non-death punishments over the death penalty, as do younger voters 18-39 (51%) and college graduates (53%). Again, even among Republicans, barely half (52%) prefer the death penalty and 39% support some other option.

### A Plurality Favors A Sentence Other Than Death For Persons Convicted Of Murder

Only Four In Ten Montanans Support The Death Penalty

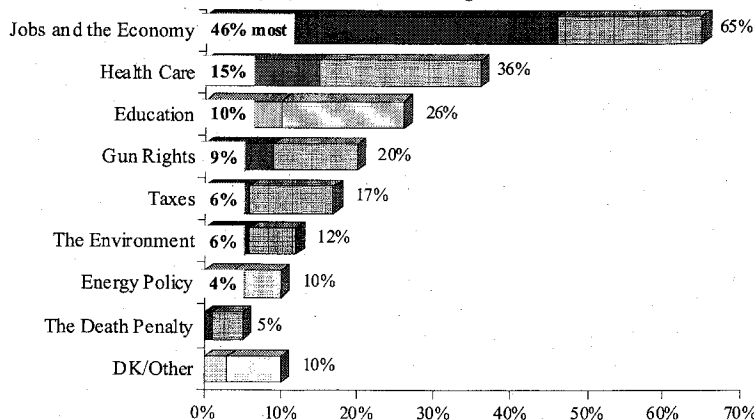
*What do you think should be the penalty for persons convicted of murder? The death penalty, life in prison with NO possibility of parole or some other sentence decided by the judge?*



### A Candidate's Position On The Death Penalty Is Not A Defining Issue For Voters

#### The Economy/Jobs, Health Care And Education, And Not The Death Penalty, Are Key Factors In Vote Choice

*Which of the following issues is the most/second most important when deciding on your vote for your Montana state legislator?*



\*darker shading=Most Important

deciding how to vote, and only 1% said it was the *most* important issue.

Few Montanans feel strongly enough about keeping the death penalty to vote against a legislator on that issue alone. Voters were asked how likely they would be to support a candidate of their party who agreed with them on most issues, but disagreed with them on the death penalty. Nearly three quarters (72%) said they were likely to vote for the candidate despite disagreeing with them on the death penalty. Supporters of replacing the death penalty were more likely to let this issue decide their vote than supporters of the death penalty. Over one in ten (11%) of Montanans feel strongly enough about replacing the death penalty to let it decide their vote. Only 8% feel strongly enough about keeping the death penalty to vote against a candidate because of this issue. Across the political spectrum there are not more than 10% of conservatives or liberals -- or Democrats or Republicans -- who will oppose a legislator because they vote to replace the death penalty.

Few Montanans see keeping the death penalty as a priority. When asked which issues are most important in their vote choice for state legislature, jobs and the economy was by far the most important issue, with nearly two-thirds (65%) saying it is the first or second most important issue deciding their vote, and 46% saying it is the *most* important issue. Health Care (36% overall, 15% most) education (26% overall, 10% most) and gun rights were the next priorities. The death penalty, however, barely registers, with only 5% saying it is the most or second most important issue when they are